

Selectboard Special Meeting Minutes

Monday, December 17, 2018 at 7pm at the Calais Town Offices

Present: Denise Wheeler (Chair), John Brabant (Vice Chair, departing at 9:20pm), Rose Pelchuck (Member), Clif Emmons (Member), Katie Lane-Karnas (Recording Secretary), Jerome Lipani (ORCA), Judy Robert (Town Clerk), Sandra Ferver (Town Treasurer), Chance Payette (Woodbury Fire Dept.), Paul Guare (Woodbury Fire Dept.)

Absent: Sharon Winn Fannon (Member)

1. Call to Order: Denise Wheeler called the meeting to order at 7:05 pm.
2. Public Comment: None.
3. Review, Additions/Changes to Agenda: None.
4. Updates/Reports: This item was not needed.
5. Woodbury Volunteer Fire Dept. (WVFD) Revised Budget: The Chair inquired about the status of the Capital Equipment Replacement Fund that the WVFD had presented at a previous meeting, and the group discussed a “Revised Estimate for Capital Replacement” spreadsheet. This fund is newly created this year; the Department has explained that they are long overdue for planning for equipment using this method and is presenting this fund to voters for the first time. Chance Payette and Paul Guare attended representing the WVFD and identified places the Department has reduced the budget (since the last time they met with the Selectboard, this fund is decreased from \$40,000 to \$31,000 per year—this is the same amount that Woodbury voters will be asked to contribute). This decrease reflects reducing the fleet by one truck and assumes that they can get a resale price on another. Chance Payette spoke about the status of the potential new fire station (on donated land); going forward, the Department will ask a Selectboard member and community members to work on exploring this (they clarified that at this time they do not know what a bond amount would be, and the planning group would be tasked with exploring that).

The Chair expressed her concern about the cost of paying for two fire departments (EMFD and WVFD), and especially the cost of the Capital Replacement Fund at \$31,000 per year (this is in addition to the operating budget of \$17,000). The Chair had drafted an article for the warning for this Fund; as this is such a large increase, it would go to the voters. The Board expressed its concern over the size of a \$31,000 indefinite increase. Calais is the only town in the state that pays for two fire companies; which may be redundant in an era of mutual aid—neighboring towns will show up. John Brabant appreciated the history of the WVFD and Calais, and recalled simple, inexpensive, largely unregulated practices allowed for running a fire department at the time of the WVFD’s inception decades ago, which is no longer possible. As a proportion of the budget, the fire service has become huge (fire emergency services are

11 percent of the budget before adding an additional fund), and the town needs to reevaluate the situation it finds itself in (in supporting two fire companies). While in the 1960's it made sense to support two companies, the situation today was outlined very differently: the state is transferring \$2.5 million of other towns' school debt as part of the Act 46 consolidation; the dispatch costs that are built in to costs have become very expensive; increasing numbers of Vermonters are moving into retirement and greatly reduced income. Chance Payette respectfully reported that there is no room to lower the budget, and without paying for trucks, great personnel cannot do their job.

Board members reiterated their respect and appreciation for the Department. Discussion included the lack of financial support for fire companies from the state or federal government and what possibilities exist for merging fire districts (also considering whether this would result in cost savings, as buildings and trucks are still needing to be located where they are). Chance Payette pointed out that Hardwick has a ladder truck, so that Woodbury does not have to keep one; the fire departments already divide up pieces such as this to save costs. All in attendance agreed that this is a very challenging situation.

The Board moved on to looking at the WVFD final proposed budget. Items were explained in detail, including the Department's yearly commitment to fundraising \$10,000 for expenses, and challenges due to state regulations (cylinder replacement of 26 tanks which must be replaced on a time schedule regardless of condition). No items were found to be extraneous to the functioning of the fire department. Board members decided to put the new request for an equipment capital replacement fund as a warned article for Town Meeting and let the voters decide; Chance Payette will attend Town Meeting to answer voters' questions. Board members commented on their appreciation for the WVFD and agreed this is ultimately a hard decision that affects peoples' lives.

6. Review and consideration of insurance options: The Town Treasurer and Town Clerk met with the Board to review and compare the FY 20 medical insurance options (Blue Cross Blue Shield sets December 31 as the deadline for changes). The Town Treasurer prepared a detailed analysis of the current plan and other options available to the Town. The current plan offered is the BCBS Gold Plan, stacked deductible option; currently, the Town's portion is 95% and the employee's portion is 5%. The Town Treasurer reminded the Selectboard that the budget line for health insurance reflects only premiums, not HRA contributions that the Town gives (\$4,000 per employee currently).

A detailed spreadsheet compared the rates for an aggregate deductible (showing a minimal cost savings to the Town) and the Gold Plan CDHP-aggregate deductible (resulting in a \$5,000 deduction to the Town's contribution over last year); they also considered a 90%/10% split. This last option was discussed in detail: it would save the town approx. \$10,000 and help mitigate the HRA deficit from last year. (The Treasurer said the Board budgeted last year only for premiums, not for HRA amounts so in the future HRA figures will need to be calculated and included in the health insurance line item.) The Treasurer reviewed average HRA use over the past few years which showed a sharp increase. The Chair commented that the Town's employee population has changed as have the coverages offered by the policies. Switching to this proposed plan would help mitigate the budget that was due to HRA expenses. Speaking to the significant benefit to the employees, the Treasurer and Town Clerk explained that if the

Town does the full contribution of \$6000 for the HRA (or \$3000 for an individual) in conjunction with this plan, this would lower the employee liability to \$0 (in other words, the employee would no longer be at risk of finding himself in a situation where he has thousands of dollars' worth of deductible due to an emergency room visit, lab work, etc). The current plan charges \$30 for a specialist and \$15 for doctor; however, hospitalization, ER and tests are expensive and go to the significant deductible. The CDHP aggregate deductible plan would lower the employee liability from \$8100 to \$0 per year. The Town Clerk expressed her appreciation for the Treasurer's research into the matter, and they both acknowledged their support of the generous package.

The Town Treasurer explained that the health insurance budget for FY20 is level funded plus an additional \$5000; this will help bring the HRA account more in line. The Treasurer explained that monthly reports do indicate that the plan is currently widely used in each department. The Board also thanked the Town Treasurer for her work on researching and clarifying the comparisons and finding an option in which everyone wins. The Selectboard made a note going forward to budget an amount for the HRA each year. The Board decided to invite the Highway Department to look at the changes to the health insurance plan at staff meeting on Wednesday.

John Brabant made a motion to move employees to the BCBS Gold Plan CDHP-aggregate deductible plan, with the premium split being 90% town portion and 10% responsibility of the employees, decision going into effect 12/17/2018 and the plan going into effect 1/1/2019. Rose Pelchuck seconded, and the motion passed unanimously.

7. Budget/Town Report Working Session:

- a) FY 2020 Budget and Draft 2019 Warning: The \$40,000 in the draft budget for the WVFD was removed (because it was decided at this meeting to be included as a warned article). Vermont Home Health and Hospice is the only group on the list of social service agencies that increased its requested appropriation. CVSWMD and Kellogg-Hubbard Library are both level funded—the Board decided to keep both as articles to allow ease of comparisons from year to year, especially in anticipation of voter scrutiny this year in light of Act 46's effects on tax rate. The Board looked at proposed budgeted wages for Town Clerk and Assistant Town Clerk.

The Board make a note to look at the Personnel Policy to consider the future possibility of including an incentive for employees to utilize a spouse's health insurance plan.

The item for the COTTs digitization of Town indexes, which would create a searchable system of online index cards, was discussed and project estimates were compared. One option involves payment starting at the "go live" date, and the other option involves payment due at the start of project initiation. The Board and Town Clerk discussed the risk factor involved in waiting to digitize (for example, in the case of a fire). The Board decided to leave \$10,000 in the budget for this process, and office staff will research the pricing options.

The Town Treasurer's proposed hours and salary were discussed. The budgeted amount for this position in the recent past reflected less hours than the position currently requires, as

several of the duties now performed by the Town Treasurer were the responsibility of the former Selectboard Administrator (such as grants, human resources, OSHA reporting, grants administration and insurances). The Town Treasurer explained that over the past weeks, her work on the NEMRC project and delinquent tax work has ended and she has been able to analyze how much work she can reach in her allotted 32 hours per week. She explained the ways in which 32 hours is not enough to meet all the duties of the Treasurer (she has consistently worked more hours than this per week). The Delinquent Tax Collector position is beyond the 40 hours per week that the Treasurer position requires. The Board compared the hours performed by different configurations of Town Clerk, Town Treasurer and Assistant Town Clerk over the past few years and found this in line with what the Town Treasurer's analysis.

- b) Draft 2019 Warning: The Board decided to list the warned item for the mower to not exceed \$80,000. The Chair mentioned that the Cemetery budget is decreasing \$10,000. The Treasurer reported that there are no organizations this year requesting approval of tax-exempt status.

The Town Clerk reported that the five town clerks are meeting with Superintendent Bill Kimball to start planning the Act 46 January 14 district-wide town meeting at U-32; if at that meeting they vote to use Australian ballot, there will be an Australian ballot vote at a date soon following the town meeting. The Board asked the Town Clerk to communicate with the Superintendent regarding scheduling an informational meeting; she will have more information to share after the meeting. The Town Clerk thanked the Board for their incredible service to the town and she and the Town Treasurer shared holiday gifts with them as a token of their appreciation. The Town Treasurer promised that there are heart nuts included in the gift packages; her family is growing these trees which are hardy in zone four, and if careful when cracked open, they will reveal a heart shape. The Selectboard thanked the Town Clerk and Treasurer.

- 8. Computer Support: This item was tabled until a subsequent meeting.
- 9. Chair update, projects, etc.: This item was not needed.
- 10. Review and approve minutes, warrants
 - a) The Board reviewed the invoices and orders were processed for payment.
 - b) Rose Pelchuck moved and Clif Emmons seconded to approve the minutes of the 12/3/2018 meeting, with the changes as noted; the motion passed 3-0.Clif Emmons moved and Rose Pelchuck seconded to approve the minutes of the 12/10/2018 meeting, with the changes as noted; the motion passed 3-0.
- 11. Executive Session for Personnel Matters: This item was not needed.
- 12. Other business/old business/new business: None.
- 13. Adjournment: Rose Pelchuck made a motion to adjourn at 9:29 pm. The motion was seconded, voted on and carried 3-0.

Date: 12/17/2018 Respectfully Submitted, Katie Lane-Karnas, Recording Secretary
Approved by the Selectboard at the 1/28/2019 meeting

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<https://drive.google.com/open?id=1uYF1RZWG1Lqcg-dS3seHy6YtuMCVkUlu>